

Mentoring Future Engagement Leaders: The Community Informatics Studio

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Introduction

Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS)
“People use information for analysis, inquiry, collaboration, and play—and in so doing, change the world. GSLIS is dedicated to shaping the future of information through research, education, and **engagement**, both public and professional. Our mission is to **lead** the way in understanding the use of information in science, culture, society, commerce, and the diverse activities of our daily lives.”

Center for Digital Inclusion (CDI)

CDI is leading multiple efforts to improve the democratic, social and economic vitality of communities through the use of information technologies. CDI is committed to weighing how best to ameliorate the digital divide by **building capacity** in people, organizations and communities to satisfy **human development** needs with technologies.

Library-led Community Engagement & Social Justice

The *WebJunction Competency Index* has been developed to “help staff identify and obtain the knowledge, skills and support needed to power relevant and vibrant libraries.” Updated in 2014, **community engagement** and 21st century skills such as **communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity** have been incorporated throughout the index. As libraries continue to transform to meet emerging needs of their communities, the American Library Association has embarked on a program to accelerate and deepen **library-led community engagement**. However, libraries have also historically been susceptible to reproducing and perpetuating systemic injustice such as institutional racism found in the broader society (Honma, 2005). This has led to calls for the library to claim an expanded vision of **engagement and social justice** so as to bring about collective efforts with people from all social locations for self and social emancipation (Honma, 2005; Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2009)

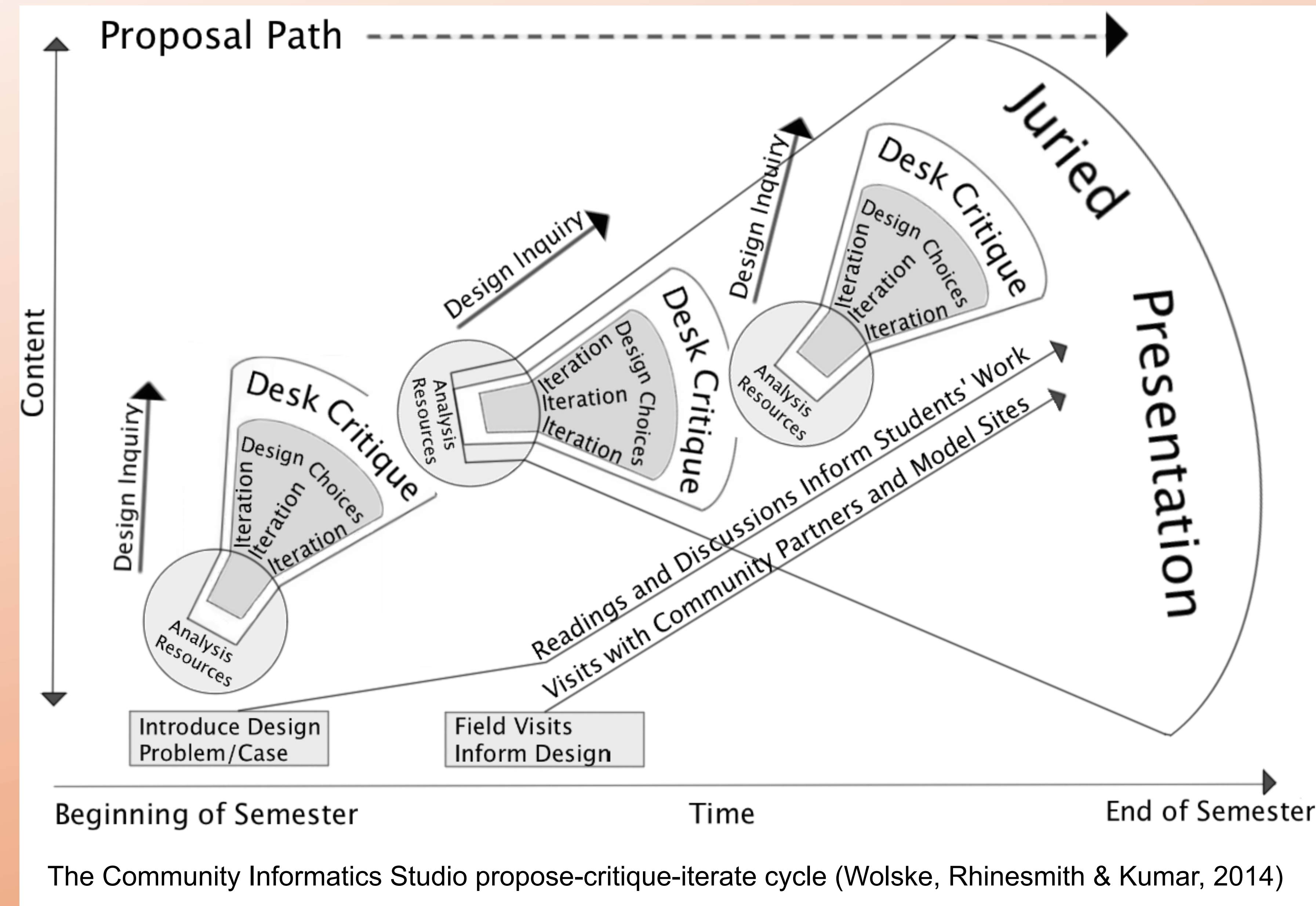
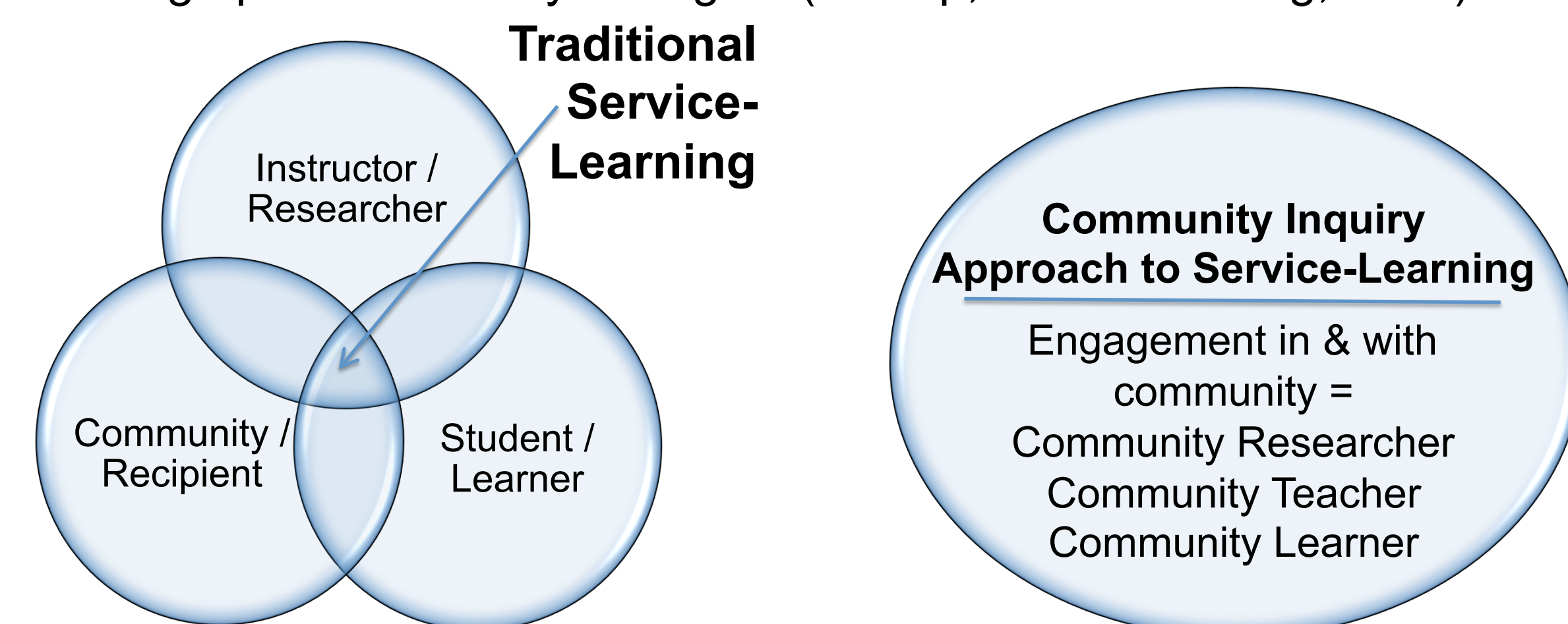
Community Informatics Studio

Brings community engagement + theory + reflection into dialogue to advance a more nuanced and critical understanding of the social justice implications behind project design choices.

Community Informatics: The study of how people in geographic locations interact with and effectively use information and communication technology (field of study) as well as its application to support community development goals (field of practice).

Studio-based Learning: Rooted in the apprentice model of learning, studio pedagogy encourages professional development by doing real design problems, often in community. It reflects John Dewey’s approach to experiential learning (Lackey, 1999).

Community Inquiry: Inquiry conducted of, for, and by communities as living social organisms. Inquiry is driven by community problems, building upon community strengths (Bishop, Bruce & Jeong, 2009).



How can community inquiry and studio-based learning be combined to construct a capstone experience for engagement leaders?

1. Knowledge of the world is socially constructed within specific historical and social contexts that are fundamentally mediated by power relations. Facts are always determined by some degree of ideological inscription (Kincheloe and McLaren 2009 p. 304);
2. Theory and praxis must be brought together in dialogue to ground transformative, liberative action and reflection in community spaces—an interpretive and critical approach;
3. Instructors, students, and community partners in the studio must be co-learners and co-creators of knowledge, and should benefit equally from their participation in engagement projects;
4. The starting point for any community engagement project must be an asset-based perspective that considers the bundle of resources each participant brings to the project, along with their capability sets allowing the conversion of these resources into valued doings and beings;
5. Community-university partnerships should embody a high degree of citizen power, and energy should be intentionally focused on making sure the community gains ultimate control over the decision-making and managerial power (Arnstein 1967 p. 217) in engagement projects;
6. Great care and ongoing assessments are needed in research, teaching, and practice with community members in order to: (a) ensure that engagement does not reinforce existing race, class, and gender inequalities, and (b) reduce the potential of causing any harm in community settings; and
7. Difference must be embraced as a resource (Eubanks 2011 p. 27) and strategy for promoting multiple ways of knowing—thereby building a culture of epistemological pluralism.

(List adapted from Rhinesmith & Wolske, 2014)



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